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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000684

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [MR](#)

SUBJECT: ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE SOUTH: A DEPUTY MAYOR  
OFFERS A CANDID VIEW

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: On the surface, ethnic issues in Southern Mauritania appear to be better than ever -- both happy and peaceful. However, one deputy mayor was willing to describe the lack of national unity and the lack of a true feeling of citizenship, especially among youth. This situation, according to him, was beginning to create visible ethnic divisions within the younger generation. End Summary.

12. (SBU) From November 10-12, a three-person Embassy and USAID team traveled to southern Mauritania to meet with local officials and assess repatriation efforts of the thousands of returnees who were either deported or sought refuge in Senegal from the Mauritanian's 1989-1992 ethnic fighting, otherwise known as the "Passif Humanitaire". The team visited a number of regional and department officials and four returnee sites in the regions of Trarza, Brakna and Gorgol.

13. (C) In almost all of these places, community leaders painted a rosy picture of relations between the various ethnicities, stating that there were no ethnic tensions whatsoever. They supported these assertions by stating that people from the different ethnic groups intermarried, spoke each other's language, and ate together.

14. (C) However, it was in Kaedi, the regional capital of Gorgol, where the team encountered a young deputy mayor, Seybani Sidi Diagana and two of his deputy mayor counterparts, who were willing to talk more openly about growing ethnic tensions. According to Diagana, a man in his mid-thirties, people in Kaedi are both politically and ethnically divided. He said the southern regions are known for being fiefdoms of political opposition. This, he explained, is why these regions are the country's poorest and cut off from the majority of government assistance. He went on to say that Gorgol is the country's second poorest region, with first place going to its southern (and more remote) neighbor, Guidimaka.

15. (C) Diagana blamed southern political issues on political lethargy and immaturity, complaining that there is a detachment between the capital and the rural south. He explained that since the advent of democracy (2006-2007 elections), Gorgol Members of Parliament have not defended or fought for increased assistance to the Gorgol region. He gave the example of flooding in 2007, when more northern towns like Tintane, in easy access of Nouakchott, received

all the humanitarian and financial assistance, while Kaedi, which also flooded at that time, received nothing from Nouakchott. According to Diagana, Gorgol inhabitants do not even have enough money to buy food, let alone farming equipment, which he reported they desperately needed.

¶6. (C) Towards the end of the meeting, Diagana opened up a frank discussion of ethnic relations in the area, specifically with respect to the youth. Speaking in a candid manner that EmbOffs had not encountered previously on the trip, Diagana explained that there are increasing ethnic divisions among the youth, because "they mirror what they see", possibly inferring that older Mauriticians are also partial to this behavior, either consciously or unconsciously. According to him, the four main ethnic groups -- White Moor, Haratine, Wolof, and Hupular -- tend to socialize within their own ethnic group to a growing extent. He noted that this is true at various levels, including at schools and with groups simply walking down the street. He emphasized that this was a psychological attitude -- a voluntary "collective mentality" of self-separation, rather than groups actively pitting themselves against each other. Diagana explained that although President Abdallahi had initiated a program of National Unity, the junta had put that program on hold since the August 6 coup. He lamented that Mauriticians have little sense of citizenship or societal belonging, and as a result, a fixation on mediocrity. "National unity is a facade," he flatly stated. According to Diagana, the only way to resolve this problem is to empower the youth -- economically and socially. He said that youth vocational training efforts should be significantly

NOUAKCHOTT 00000684 002 OF 002

increased. He gave as an example the region's out-dated farming techniques, and how youth could be trained in new farming methodologies to help the region and ultimately the nation. He also said that youth have to be given the opportunity to choose what technical training they will receive because if training is forced upon them, the effort will backfire.

¶7. (C) Comment: It took many meetings with community leaders to finally come across someone who was willing to move beyond the seemingly automatic statements that there are no ethnic tensions in the south. Deputy Mayor Diagana's observations of growing ethnic tensions among youth in the southern regions mirrors findings in the USAID and DOD's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) program design research conducted in Mauritania in 2005, 2006 and ¶2008. While the TSCTP studies focused on more northern and eastern urban centers, the recent Gorgol visit was enlightening because it demonstrates that this issue could be more geographically pervasive than originally thought. End comment.

¶8. (C) Charge Comment: One of the main reasons for sending the Mission delegation to the south was in response to comments from Afro-Mauritanian politicians that the black community was prepared to take up arms against the military regime seen as protecting white Arab interests over Black Moors and Afro-Mauritanians. While ethnic divisions certainly remain, we did not see a region ready to blow. As in previous reporting on the legacy of the 1980's and early 90's expulsion of Afro-Mauritanians to Senegal, we find sentiments about racial issues far more charged among Nouakchott elites and the diaspora than we find among Afro-Mauritanians living in the heart of the issue. End Comment  
HANKINS